

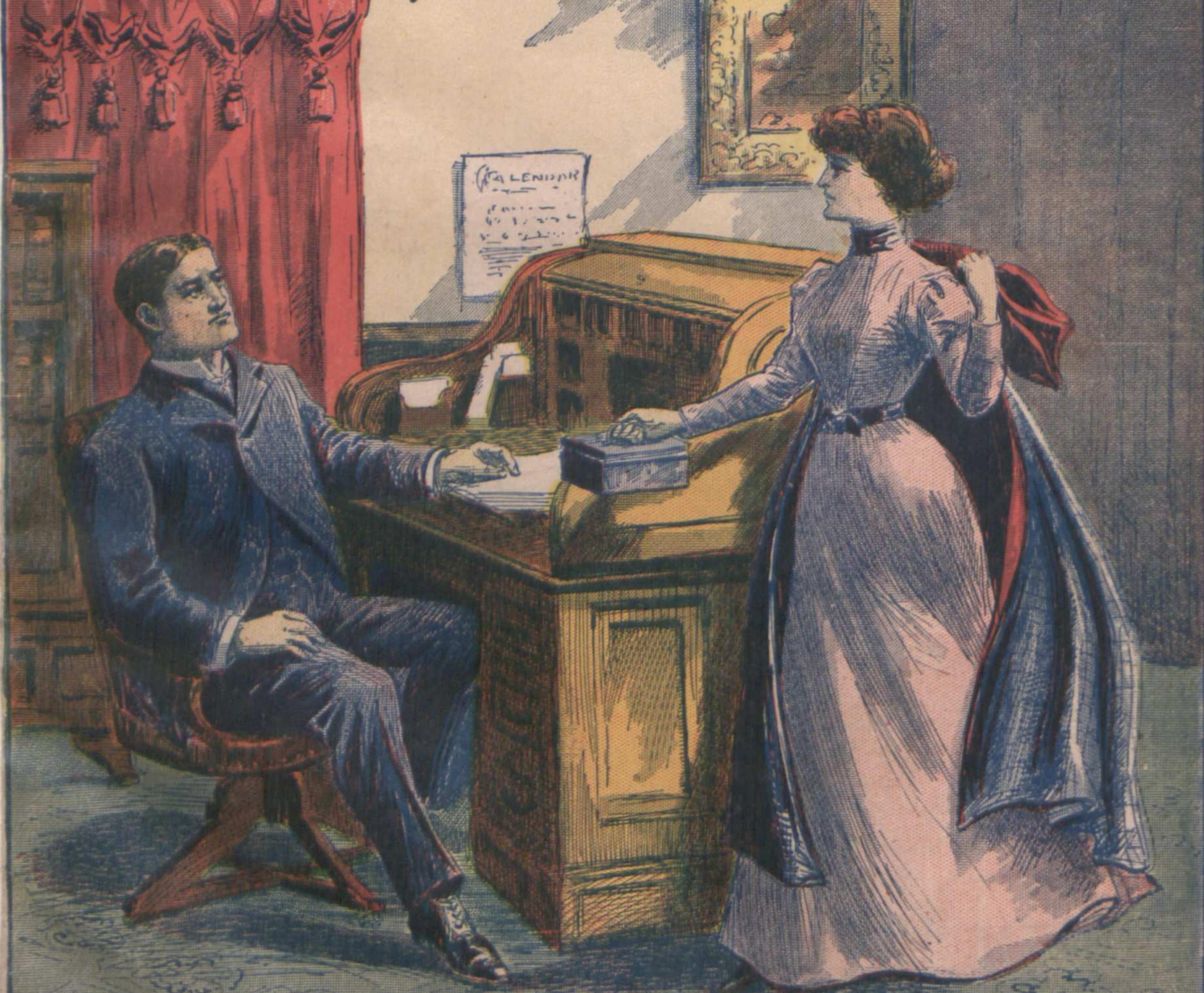
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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NICK CARTER'S SILENT SEARCH OR-A DRIVE AT A FAKE DETECTIVE

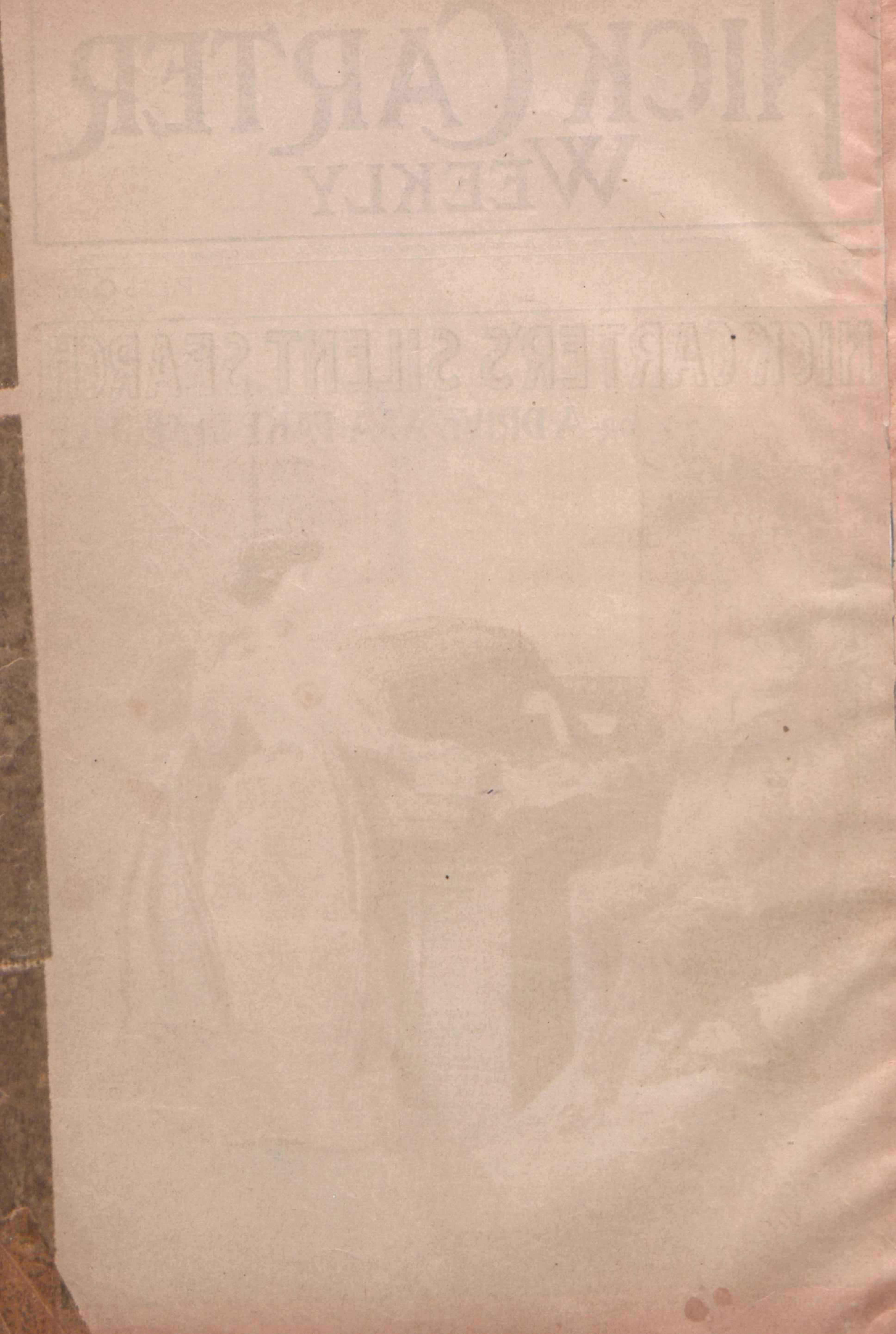


BY

THE AUTHOR OF

NICK CARTER

AS THE YOUNG WOMAN THREW BACK HER CLOAK, NICK'S CURIOSITY WAS AROUSED BY THE SIGHT OF THE JEWEL BOX.



A New story, written specially for the Nick Carter Weekly, and will not appear in any other number.

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Nick Carter's Silent Search

OR,

A DRIVE AT A FAKE DETECTIVE

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

A MESSENGER FROM LONDON.

"A person to see you, Mr. Carter."

"Very well."

Nick Carter, arranging some papers at his private desk, nodded to his man-servant.

"Show him in, sir?"

"Certainly."

"In here?"

"Why, of course."

Nick lifted his eyes. It was not the way of his briskly-trained servant to waste words.

His hesitating manner, therefore, attracted the attention of the famous detective.

"What is wrong?" inquired Nick.

"Something out of the usual sir, that is all. The visitor is a messenger who says he has come all the way from London especially to see Mr. Nicholas Carter."

"So?" murmured Nick.

"And he is in a hurry, for he wants to deliver his message and catch the next steamer back for England—"

"Quick action, that."

"Leaving in forty minutes."

"Quite unique, truly. Show in, if you please, the messenger from London!" said Nick Carter.

The secret service expert was somewhat interested in the lay-out of the moment.

Still, it would not have been in accordance with his imperturbable nature to be particularly surprised had the Shah of Persia or the Khan of Tartary been personally announced.

Nick's fame was world-wide, and his services were not infrequently enlisted in international matters.

Cablegrams, personal visits from all kinds of distinguished foreign clients, were matters of occasional routine.

The servant's report, however, indicated

that a piece of business was on the tapis much out of the ordinary.

There had been a recent "fad" in vogue with "swell" people of sending letters, presents, and the like, "across the pond," as if it were a mere journey over the Thames.

In such instances, of course, the carrying out of these expensive whims was pure affection.

It was a new excitement with people having plenty of money and time to spare.

Nick realized that there was some other element than mere caprice in the present proceeding.

Devoted strictly to business, he doubted if any person—old-time friend or prospective client—would approach him in this old way unless urgency or extreme secrecy were involved in the transaction.

So, Nick anticipated some interesting, if not lively, developments as an outcome of his servant's announcement.

He brushed his papers to one side and set a full glance upon the person now ushered into the room.

The stranger was a young man of about twenty.

He was undersized, but agile, with a shrewd eye and an exceedingly intelligent face.

He lifted his cap, which bore no badge.

He placed a finger on a button of the long, light, tourist ulster, which enveloped him to the ankles, and ripped the front free to the chin with a single quick movement.

Beneath was exhibited the uniform of his craft.

Nick instantly recognized this, together with the badge he had often seen in the Strand, Piccadilly, West End, in various parts of London.

The visitor showed no more importance of manner than if he had come only one mile, instead of thousands.

"Mr. Nicholas Carter?" he said, in a conventional drawl.

"I am that person," assented Nick.

"Please sign."

"H'm!"

The messenger had whipped out from an inner pocket a delivery book.

Strapped with an elastic band to one of the folded faces was a card bearing writing.

Strapped with an elastic band to the other folded face was a delivery blank.

Nick glanced at the former; it bore, in clear, black letters, this address:

"Mr. Nicholas Carter, New York City, United States of America."

This, it seemed, must be in the handwriting of the original sender.

Below, doubtlessly penciled at the office of the messenger service in London, was the detective's private house address.

"Sign, eh?" said Nick, scanning the blank.

"Yes, sir."

Nick wrote his name in the signature line.

"Time, also, if you please," suggested the messenger, further.

"Humph!"

Nick glanced at his watch.

"9:13 a. m.," he announced.

"Can't you make it 9 even, sir?"

The detective rather entertainedly regarded this model of precision.

"You see, I took a wrong street in coming here," the messenger explained.

He was as exact in the formalities as though engaged on a fifteen minutes' run instead of that of fifteen days.

"Want to make a fast record," remarked Nick, noting the time with his pencil.

"Always, sir."

"I see by this blank you are 'Durkey?'"

"Yes, sir; No. 17, special."

"Left London on the twelfth?"

"At 7:43 p. m., on twenty minutes' notice."

"You must be used to this sort of thing."

"I have made St. Petersburg twice, and beat Lord Curzon on a special to Bombay."

Nick saw that the messenger was an expert in his line, but still a mere machine.

The visitor anxiously watched the clock's face behind Nick.

The detective drew free the card directed to himself.

He turned it over; the reverse side was blank.

"Well, what does this mean?" he asked, looking in his caller's face.

"You want the letter, sir?"

"Oh! there is a letter."

"Certainly."

The messenger drew out a pocket-knife. It was bladed and handled like the average pocket-knife.

But as he pressed a spring, from the back there snapped free a small section.

"This is the key, sir," he informed Nick, putting the knife into his hand.

"I see that it is a key," nodded Nick, "and very clever! Well, my friend, what is the key for?"

"I will show you, sir."

"Do so."

The messenger raised his coat sleeve to the elbow.

Then he unbuttoned a wristband.

As he bared his arm, somewhat above the wrist, Nick discerned a flat bulging object that fitted it half-way around, like a bandage.

It was of steel, but covered with leather, and the encircling strap had a keyhole like a handcuff.

"For valuables and long distances," explained the messenger from London.

"You get it down very fine," complimented Nick.

Nick at once applied the key, and the folding band turned back on a hinge.

The messenger drew off the contrivance. He slipped a slide on the lower side.

There was revealed a shallow pocket. In this lay an object done up in oiled silk.

The messenger unfolded this covering, and brought to light a letter.

It bore the words: "Mr. Nicholas Carter," and in the same handwriting as that upon the card.

"Wait a minute," directed Nick, preparing to open this letter.

"But that is all, sir!" demurred the messenger, with another anxious glance at the clock.

"This missive may suggest a reply."

"I have no instructions to take it," formally announced the messenger.

"Indeed!"

"I am authorized to think that our connection with the sender ends entirely with the delivery of that letter."

"I see," murmured Nick. "You do not know the sender?"

"Oh, no, sir! It is a matter of money and

time for me to catch the return steamer, and if you please, I will now depart."

There was system here that even Nick's hospitable spirit would not consent to interfere with.

He slipped a hand into his pocket, however, and drew out his purse.

"Excuse me," said the messenger, anticipating and backing away, "but, really, the service forbids anything like that."

"My friend, you are a jewel of consistency!" complimented Nick.

"Thank you, sir."

"Everything in order so far as I am concerned?"

"Perfectly."

"You can go, then. One minute! The London Central Office address? It may be necessary for me to remember that."

The messenger rattled it off glibly, retreated to the door, made a brief bow, and was gone.

Nick Carter sat down at his desk to examine the letter that had been sent so many thousands of miles by special messenger.

CHAPTER II.

PAYABLE ON DEMAND.

"Chick!"

Nick Carter devoted three minutes to the inspection of the letter that had so strangely reached him. He knew that his assistant was in the adjoining room, and, opening its door, he now called his name.

The young professional was in Nick's presence instantaneously, and he seated himself opposite, in response to a wave of Nick's hand.

Chick's keen eye ran over what lay directly in front of his chief, on the desk.

There was a letter, a slip of paper, and a folded bank note.

"Business?" he asked.

"In a way, Chick, I believe."

Nick unfolded the note. **Chick noted** its termination.

"A hundred pounds?" he said.

"An advance fee."

"From whom?"

"A client beyond the sea."

"Known?"

"Unknown, except by reputation."

"Do I know him?"

"You may recall him, as I have done."

Nick wheeled in his chair. Eye and hand ran a brief range of the volumes filling a pivot book-stand directly behind him.

He drew out one.

It was filled with memoranda and portraits.

"That is the man," he said, opening at a certain page.

Chick shifted the book around so as to afford a perfect view.

"'Randal Liscomb,'" he read, consulting the picture of a fine-looking man.

"Yes."

"What was his case?"

"Alleged murder. Have you got the points?"

Chick nodded as he contemplated the perusal of a briefly printed synopsis of the Randal Liscomb tragedy.

"A brawl, a question of identity, flight, disappearance," he murmured—"the old story."

"Exactly so; no motive or malice for the deed, seemingly."

"But the man was a coward?"

"Or there was something really under the surface. But we are not concerned with that. The police handled the affair, dropped it. Liscomb supposedly committed suicide."

"Then what have we to do with the case?"

"His resurrection."

"He is alive?"

"He was when he wrote this letter."

Nick placed his hand upon the one just received.

"That letter?" murmured Chick, expectantly.

"Yes, he wrote this letter a few days ago in London."

"He is abroad, then?"

"Yes, Chick. A special messenger from England just delivered the letter."

Nick related the business-like visit that had concluded with his recent dismissal of the messenger.

"And the letter?" suggested Chick.

"It contained that hundred-pound note and this."

Nick handed the little open slip of paper to his assistant.

It was dated two years back, and it read:

"Received of Randal Liscomb fifty thousand dollars, in Government bonds, in the name of his late wife, in trust."

This was signed, "Nathan Greene."

"Who is Nathan Greene?" inquired Chick.

Nick consulted a directory. In his usual quick way he ran over its pages.

"Here we have it," he said.

Chick scanned above his finger, and remarked:

"A banker, in a small way, up town."

"It seems so," assented Nick. "Look at the other side, Chick."

The latter did this.

"An indorsement?" he remarked.

This read:

"Mr. Nathan Greene will deliver the property herein named to my daughter, Viola Liscomb, on demand."

It was signed by Nick's foreign client.

"And the letter?" inquired Chick.

"It is brief—to the point."

"What does it say?"

"It is an appeal."

"From a criminal?"

"No; from a dying man—avowedly, too, an innocent one. Liscomb says he will not live a week, his physician informs him. An alien, with a great crime standing to his charge, he asks me to let the impression continue that it was really he who committed suicide from an ocean steamer a year and a half ago."

"He does not seek to expiate or explain his crime?"

"He claims to have been the victim of a plot no power can unmask—it is too late, he asserts. He simply wishes his daughter cared for."

"Why did he not send her the order?"

"He would rather she thought him dead."

"I see. Then why not to this banker?"

"Greene?"

"Yes."

"He just intimated that he is fearful of trusting anybody."

"Except you?"

"He seems to trust me."

"A high compliment!"

"I do not want his hundred pounds; I shall turn the money over to the daughter."

"But you will do as he says?"

"Certainly."

"He asks you to see that she receives those bonds."

"That is it. The man probably tells the truth; he is dying, or dead. It would be difficult to trace him. He planned a sure way of reaching me, safely, rapidly. It is like a request from another world—I will do what he says. He gives the address of his daughter."

"What is it?"

"There."

Nick penciled on a card, and passed it to his assistant.

Chick read the address.

"You wish me to notify this young lady?" he asked.

"To call upon me."

"Nothing more?"

"I will explain to her."

Chick bowed, understandingly.

"To-day?" he asked.

"At once, if practicable."

"I will make it so."

Nick carefully filed away the letter he had received.

He then resumed work on some routine business that had occupied his attention when the interruption came.

There was always an abundance of business to which he could give his services, and he continued absorbed for some three hours without noticing the lapse of time.

Nick had decided to postpone a necessary visit to Police Headquarters until he heard from Chick.

It looked, however, as though his assistant was having some trouble in finding the young lady he had been instructed to hunt up.

A telephone message reached the detective just as he was preparing to leave the house.

It was from Chick. It informed his superior that he had experienced some difficulty in locating Miss Viola Liscomb.

She had made several removals in a year—from bad to worse, in the way of locality, Chick volunteered.

Chick had found her at last; she would call upon Nick some time around two o'clock.

At that hour, promptly, the detective made it a point to return to home headquarters.

He had been seated but a few moments when he heard his servant admit somebody to the house.

The servant had been instructed, so Nick, before he looked up, anticipated who it was that was ushered into the room.

A woman of about twenty, her features concealed by a long, hooded waterproof, advanced slowly, timorously.

Nick regarded her with curiosity as she threw back this covering.

He noticed a pale, beautiful and impressive face, and saw that the visitor had a small box, partially concealed by the folds of the cloak.

"This is—Mr. Carter?"

Nick arose, and bowed reassuringly.

"A young gentleman—" began the young lady, and paused, her voice trembling.

"You seem weary," suggested Nick, proffering a chair.

"Yes, I have walked a long way," murmured the girl, gratefully sinking to the seat.

"You are Miss Viola Liscomb, I apprehend?" said Nick.

"Yes, Mr. Carter."

Her eyes scanned his face with great earnestness.

"Your messenger had trouble in finding me," she went on. "I have—have been obliged to make a good many removals since occupying the house to which he was originally sent."

"It was your old home?"

"Yes," answered the girl, briefly, and tears came to her eyes.

Then, suddenly, she fixed an anxious look upon her host, and said:

"Mr. Carter, I know who you are."

"Indeed?"

"I mean that I know that you are of the detective service."

"You say that rather ominously, Miss Liscomb," remarked Nick, with the shadow of a smile.

"Because I fear!"

"What?"

"Trouble."

"For yourself?"

"For—my father. Mr. Carter, is it because of him that you have sent for me?"

"In part, but it indicates no trouble for him, poor soul!"

"Poor soul, indeed!" murmured his daughter, her lips quivering, "for he died distracted, bereft, unable to clear the name upon which others had placed the stain of shame!"

The accepted assumption that Randal Liscomb had committed suicide helped Nick over a disagreeable point in the interview.

"Innocent or guilty?" he said.

"Oh, he was certainly innocent! Do I not know my father?"

"It is not of the past, but the present, that I must speak," said Nick.

"The present—what can it hold for me?"

"Considerable, my dear young lady, I hope," said Nick, with cheerfulness. "To be clear, there has come into my hands a paper concerning you."

"Concerning me?"

"It is, in fact, an order on a local bank, or banker, for some money."

"For money?"

"Rightfully yours; it belonged to your dead mother."

The girl looked bewildered.

"It is for the sum of fifty thousand dollars."

Nick had not counted on the effect of his words.

His beautiful visitor was greatly excited.

He attributed her agitation to a natural craving for wealth, for comfort, for luxury.

But instantly he discovered how he had wronged her, as she exclaimed in an emphatic tone, the sternness of which pierced her sobs:

"Then at last—at last, thank Heaven!"

"At last—what?" inquired Nick.

"Justice!"

"For your father?"

"Yes."

"You hope—"

"To vindicate him—oh, that shall be!"

The influence of her fervor fairly moved Nick.

"You do not know," she said, in a low

tone, "that I have used all I had, all I could earn, to accomplish that vindication."

"You mean you have sought to investigate the circumstances surrounding your father's connection with the killing of a man?"

"Yes, and his most mysterious flight, as well as his silence to me! to me, whom he so loved!"

"I have instructions," said Nick, "to turn over to you an order for this fifty thousand dollars. It is the same as money—Government bonds."

"Instructions from whom?" inquired Miss Liscomb.

"Your father originally possessed the order."

"But—after all this time!"

"I have just accidentally discovered it," said Nick.

"Must I be content with that explanation?"

"Yes," said Nick, definitely.

The young lady sighed, even amid her good fortune.

"The fifty thousand dollars are in a local bank," continued Nick.

"The treasure has been there all the time?" inquired Miss Liscomb.

"I believe so."

"Then I should like to ask the people in charge of it—if it was rightfully mine."

"Yes, surely so."

"I should like to ask these bank people a pertinent question, why I was not notified of the fact."

"It would not be amiss," said Nick. "When will it suit your convenience, Miss Liscomb, to go for the money?"

"I am at leisure always."

"Now?"

"Will that suit you?"

"Perfectly."

"Then at once, yes."

"I will get a cab," said Nick, and started for the door.

"Is it far?" inquired the young lady.

"Some distance uptown."

"A bank, you said?"

"A small, private bank, I imagine, from the name of its presiding manager, or whoever he may be, on whom the order is drawn."

"What is his name?"

"It is Nathan Greene."

Miss Viola Liscomb started at these words, and shivered as though struck by a chilling blast.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE BANK.

Nick Carter at once saw that he had struck a new note in alluding to Mr. Nathan Greene.

The girl's face had whitened and hardened; a certain severity had succeeded a first sentiment of repugnance.

"You know Mr. Nathan Greene?" inquired Nick.

"Yes, I know him," replied the girl, coldly.

"He was an acquaintance—a friend?"

"He pretended to be my father's friend."

"Only pretended?"

"Yes. I knew that my father had dealings with him. When the blow came, in my agony and helplessness, I went to him."

"For assistance?"

"For advice—for counsel."

"And he?"

The girl hesitated and flushed. Then she said, reluctantly:

"He asked me to marry him."

Nick was silent, but thoughtful.

"And you?"

The young lady's eyes flashed.

"Can you ask me that?"

"Not knowing anything about the man personally, I do ask it," said Nick.

"I refused him, for I was outraged at the proposal coming at such a time. He was angry, insulting; he told me that no one else would so honor the daughter of a murderer."

"He said that, did he?" interrupted Nick.

"And affronted me by the offer of money. Is it this man who all this time has held back from me the knowledge that I was comparatively wealthy?"

"Yes."

"Who allowed me to misjudge my dear father—who even assured me that my father had taken every dollar he could secure away with him?"

"Yes."

Something tragic, grand, was slowly coming into the girl's face.

This expression was fine and noble. She did not speak, but Nick read what was going on under the surface.

"I will go with you at once, Mr. Carter," she said, calmly, after a brief period of silence. "Then—"

"Then?" inquired Nick.

"I should like to tell you something."

"Concerning your father?"

"Concerning his enemies, of whom this man Greene must be one. I suspected it, but I never knew it until now."

Nick left the room to speak to his servant.

The hand resting on his arm as he led its owner to the conveyance waiting at the curb was like ice, marble.

Nick knew that he was doing something more than merely endeavoring to secure for this girl her rights.

The far-seeing detective expert discerned in the dim distance the mazes of an old crime resurrected.

When the conveyance reached the address that the directory had given, Nick found it to be quite a pretentious private bank.

An old but substantial residence, reconstructed for business purposes, was wholly occupied by the institution over which Mr. Nathan Greene presided.

The girl kept her face concealed from the curious eyes of clerks, who were ranged behind various desks as Nick led her through the counting room.

The detective proceeded towards an apartment the door of which bore the name of the head of the institution, and the word "Private."

"Beg pardon, sir," said a brisk, mottle-faced man, blocking the way by stepping in Nick's path, "but you wish to see—"

"Mr. Nathan Greene."

"It is after banking hours."

"Mr. Greene will probably see us, for all that, if you will mention my name."

"Oh, yes; your name?"

"Mr. Nicholas Carter."

The man quailed before Nick's penetrating glance.

"Just so! just so!" he muttered, quite nervously.

The speaker backed past the private doorway.

When he returned it was to bow obsequiously and wave the visitors to the blockaded sanctum.

The girl paused in the shadow. The florid-faced man who sat at a desk trying to look consequential was mere tissue paper to shrewd Nick Carter.

In a twinkling the detective traced visible anxiety in the face and manner of this sinister-eyed individual.

"You wished to see me, Mr.—Mr.—" began the banker, rising slowly.

"Carter—Nicholas Carter."

"And about—"

"This young lady's business affairs."

Greene had not before noticed Nick's companion.

"Why, yes," he said, wonderingly, "and her business?"

"She will tell you of that herself."

Nick made way for his fair charge to advance.

She did so, dropping back the folds of her hood and standing completely revealed as to her features.

"Why—why—"

Beginning with his face blanching, Greene ended with a smile which was forced, sickly, apprehensive.

He dropped back to his chair, and just managed to summon sufficient composure to say, huskily:

"Be seated, pray."

The girl paid no heed to this invitation.

She simply placed upon the desk before the banker the order that Nick had given to her.

"Mr. Greene," she said, in clear, calm tones, "I wish to obtain those bonds."

"You wish—" said Greene, and grew purple.

He scanned one side of the order, and then the other.

His lips began to twist, and every vestige of color again left his face.

"I do not understand," he said.

"What?" demanded Nick, sharply.

The keen tone, the keener glance, brought the banker erect—rigid.

"I would like to know," he said, clenching the arms of his chair to secure steadiness,

"I would like to know, Miss Liscomb, how this order came to you?"

"I received it," replied the young lady, icily, "from this gentleman."

"Yes," said Nick, "I gave it to her."

"And you, sir?"

"I received it," answered Nick, steadily, "from the person whose signature it bears."

"May I ask when?"

"No!"

The banker darted a wild look at the sphinx-faced speaker.

This was not a visit. It was an invasion—an attack!

In that pale, determined face of the girl, in the inscrutable eye of the great detective, this man recognized—enemies.

He took a long breath. Nick mentally compared his momentary desperation to that of a hunted rat at bay.

"Very well," said Greene, suddenly assuming an air of business, "this is all regular, of course—but so unexpected."

"I fancy that," observed Nick.

"Mr. Greene," broke in the girl, in a quavering tone, "why was I not advised concerning this money—these bonds?"

"Why should you be?"

"They were my property."

"Hardly—a client deposited them."

"My father!"

"I obeyed his instructions—to keep them safely, till he ordered their disposition."

"You have that order now," interrupted Nick, brusquely, "produce this property, sir!"

"Certainly."

The banker brought his hand down upon a bell.

A young clerk, with a pen stuck behind his ear, appeared.

"Tell Mr. Ransom to step this way," said Greene.

"The cashier, sir?"

"Of course."

"He has left."

"Left?"

"Yes, sir; to visit his family, up in the mountains."

"Ah! I remember—he was to go this afternoon. Mr. Carter, Miss Liscomb, you will have to call again."

"Why so?" demanded Nick, suspiciously.

"The cashier has exclusive charge of the securities you wish to withdraw."

"What do you mean?" demanded Nick.

"Why, what I say," answered Greene. "They are kept, with others, in a safe to which he only has the key."

"When will he return?"

"To-morrow morning, I think he said."

"Mr. Greene," observed Nick, in a measured and significant way, "we will call here to-morrow."

"Very well, sir."

"At eleven in the morning."

"At eleven be it."

"And it is imperative that we should then have this property. You agree to that?"

"Most certainly."

"In case your cashier is delayed——"

"I will telegraph him to send the key, or appear, under any circumstances."

Nick passed from the room, the young lady upon his arm.

He noticed that her hand clutched him convulsively, that she was in a state of high nervous tension.

Neither spoke till they regained the cab. Then Nick said:

"I will send you to your home, Miss Liscomb, and I will call for you at about eleven o'clock to-morrow morning."

His companion's response came in a quick, fluttering gasp.

"Mr. Carter," she said, "we are going to have trouble!"

"Trouble?" repeated Nick, calmly. "About what?"

"That man—those bonds."

"Oh, I think not."

"I am sure, Mr. Carter, something dreadful is going to happen."

Miss Viola Liscomb was seized with a strange fit of shivering.

"You are agitated," observed Nick.

"Because I feel assured of what I say. Do not treat this lightly. When that man's eyes rested on me just now, I felt the same cold, terrifying chill that passed over me the night my father left his home, never to return—when I stood in the presence of the man who came after him."

"Some one came after him upon that night?" inquired Nick.

"Yes."

"Do you know who it was?"

"Not his real name—but his face, I saw that, and for that face I have been seeking constantly for two long years."

Miss Viola Liscomb fumbled at the box she had carried with her since arriving at the detective's home.

"I want you to take this, Mr. Carter," she said, pressing it upon him.

"It is something referring to your father's disappearance?"

"It is my account of all that was peculiar and suspicious that occurred for the few days preceding his trouble."

"I will attentively look over your statement."

"And some letters he received."

Nick bowed, to include these as well.

"And the picture, the photograph, of the mysterious man who twice visited my father at midnight, and who went away with him the evening that he finally disappeared."

"Ah! you have that?" observed Nick with surprise.

"Yes."

"And you tell me you have been looking for this man ever since?"

"Ever since, and constantly."

Nick took possession of the box.

"I will leave you here," he said, as the cab reached a corner convenient to his home. "I will look over the contents of this box, and I will call for you to-morrow morning at about eleven."

The girl put out her hand suddenly, as if to express some anxiety or enforce her recent fears.

Quietly, however, she simply touched that of the detective with a manifest token of confidence and gratitude.

Nick went straight home.

Chick was reading in "the sanctum," and looked up quickly.

"The young lady came?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," nodded Nick.

"Did you go after the bonds?"

"At once."

"Did you get them?"

"No."

"Ah!"

"To-morrow—cashier temporarily absent."

"I see."

Nick had placed the box on the desk, and Chick regarded it furtively.

"The young lady gave me this," said Nick.

"What is it?"

"Papers—a photograph, concerning her father's case."

"Photograph of whom?"

"The man she last saw with her father—who accompanied him from his home the night of his disappearance."

"That ought to amount to something as a starting point."

"If the party could be found, yes."

"Can't he be found?"

"Miss Liscomb has been looking for him these past two years."

"And has got no sight of him?"

"It seems not."

The box was not locked. Nick opened the lid.

It was filled with letters and papers almost to the top.

On the top of all these rested a photograph, face down.

Nick turned it face up.

Immediate recognition shone in the detective's steady eyes.

He passed the picture over to Chick.

"The deuce!" exclaimed the latter, jumping impetuously to his feet.

"Know him, Chick?"

"Of course I do!" exclaimed Nick Carter's young assistant. "Why, it's 'the doctor'!"

CHAPTER IV.

A FAKE DETECTIVE.

"Yes," assented Nick, "it is 'the doctor.'"

Chick's eyes began to glow.

He did not have to think back far to place the individual betrayed by the photograph.

Only once had "the doctor" crossed the path of the professional pair—but neither ever forgot.

So, very vividly and instantaneous with the recognition, there was presented to Chick's mind the record of the person in question.

"Miss Viola Liscomb has been looking for this man for two years?" he observed.

"She says so."

"Why! we handled the fellow in public not six months since."

"Evidently she did not know of that, Chick."

"He was sent up for a brief term."

"Very brief. He is the person who furnished the medicine that temporarily blinded a witness in the private car murder case, which we worked up."

"For which Aiden Lee was sent to Sing Sing?"

"Exactly."

"And his son hanged on the gallows?"

"Yes."

"The doctor——"

"Alias 'the strength-demon'——"

"And alias Purdue. He was mainly concerned in the affair as the jailer of the pretty heiress, Miss Lura Mason."

"The jury confined its attention mainly to the principal culprit, Chick; the doctor was let off with a ninety days' sentence of local imprisonment."

"Then he is only a few weeks on the town."

"If he has not left it."

"We ought to be able to find him easily."

"Oh! I am assured I can locate him, no matter where he is."

Nick spoke in a way that convinced Chick that he had some definite ideas concerning his whereabouts.

"Let us see first, however, if we care to look him up at all," suggested Nick.

The detective ran hastily over the papers and letters in the box just given into his possession by Miss Viola Liscomb.

Chick was silent during the inspection, but he was ready and waiting for information as Nick scanned the last inclosure.

"What does it tell?" asked Chick.

"Nothing direct. It looks as though for the space of several weeks previous to his disappearance Liscomb was being drawn under the influence of this doctor, if the photograph connects with a certain 'Rogers.'"

"A sure indication of crooked work."

"He was being led into some trap."

"The doctor's specialty!"

"With some specious scheme of money making as the bait."

"You don't know what?"

"Not yet."

"Then you intend to find out!"

"Chick, I think I shall find out," assented Nick, thoughtfully. "I am interested in this girl; it may be a matter of professional duty."

"Will you look up Liscomb in England?"

"Not until I am satisfied that he ought not to be neglected."

A tap sounded on the door. In a second Nick's desk was cleared of box and papers.

As the door opened the eyes of the detective were turned thither.

A stranger was shown in; Chick looked in a puzzled way at the intruder.

His dress, his beard and his mysterious actions were of an exaggerated type and at once suggesting an effort at disguise.

"Who is this?" asked Nick.

"I wish to see you, Mr. Carter."

"I am here, sir."

"In private—strictly."

"Indeed! I have the honor of meeting—"

"I shall tell you when we are—alone!" answered the visitor, in a dramatic way.

He glanced at Chick. The detective's assistant, half smiling, left the room.

The new-comer stepped forward as if treading on eggs.

He directed suspicious eyes at curtains, book-cases, doors and windows in an amusingly mysterious manner.

He sat down, first casting a searching glance under the desk—even into the waste-paper basket.

Nick had eyed him critically just once—after that the detective betrayed little curiosity, although he was strictly attentive.

"You seem troubled," he suggested.

"Only cautious, Mr. Carter!"

"Why?"

"We detectives can't be too careful, you know."

"Oh!" said Nick, "you are a detective, then?"

"I am!" answered the visitor, trying to look important. "You wouldn't know it, Mr. Carter, now, but I am completely disguised."

"Possibly!"

"I don't usually wear glasses, only for the occasion."

"Is that so? Let me inform you that one

eyebrow has come unglued, and your left whisker is slightly awry."

The detective's visitor adjusted the straying eyebrow and the unsteady whisker.

He sank back in his chair with great assurance after this performance.

"We professionals can't be too particular," he observed, sapiently.

"Nor too quick in getting down to business," hinted Nick.

"Ah! that's so. Well, Mr. Carter, I have come to see you—"

"Thanks!"

"In the interest of a client."

"You said you were a detective."

"Yes."

"From—Central?"

"Well—no."

"What line, then?"

"Bank."

"Oh! you are a bank detective?"

"That is it. Now, you would never think it, Mr. Carter, shrewd as you are—but you and I stood face to face not an hour since!"

"Why, yes," said Nick, "I remember."

"Eh!" exclaimed the other, with a start.

Nick was coolly setting some pens in order.

"I said I remember."

"You remember!" muttered his visitor, striking an attitude, agast.

"Certainly."

"You—remember!"

"Don't I say so, man!"

"You do, but—"

"It was in the counting-room of the Greene institution, up town."

"Well!"

"You are the person who challenged my right to enter."

"Till I knew who you were. You recognize me?"

"Certainly. And you hunted me up, disguised—"

"Not to fool you."

"You couldn't do that."

"I see it, and never thought of trying."

"Then—why this disguise?"

"Oh! I do that regularly."

"You do?"

"On the street."

"Why?"

"To conceal my real looks; it isn't prudent to be known in our particular calling by every Tom, Dick and Harry."

"My time is limited," said Nick, with a glance at his watch. "You have business with me?"

"Important."

"Name it."

"Well, then, as I said, I am a bank detective."

"Experienced, I suppose."

"Why—yes. I was a year at the Produce Exchange Bank, and I did some individual work on one or two big forgery cases."

"Turn up much?"

"Too deep for me."

"Ah!"

"Lately I have been associated with the Greene establishment."

"How long?"

"Well, so far, only a day or two."

"I see—routine duty."

"Oh, no!"

"No big forgeries there, I hope?" inquired Nick.

"Well, almost as bad."

"Indeed!"

"Yes—let me tell you."

"Do so."

The fake detective steadied himself for his disclosure.

This gave Nick time to think.

As to the status of his visitor, that the superficial fellow had long since betrayed.

Nick saw that he was an irresponsible person, with no record or real official standing.

He had probably drawn a janitor's salary at the Produce Exchange Bank, posing as a special watchman during the rush hours of business.

That he had a distinct motive in his present visit, its promptness clearly evidenced.

Anything concerning Nathan Greene was interesting to the detective at present, and he resolved to give the caller plenty of rope.

Nick, as he keenly scanned the man's face, instinctively believed that he was getting ready to tell him a falsehood.

"This is why I have come," said the fellow finally, and stopped.

"What is?" pressed Nick.

"On account of my Greene connection."

"Well?"

"I'm not watching the bank."

"Oh, I thought you were."

"No."

"What are you watching, then?"

"Greene."

"What for?"

"That's what I was hired to do."

"By whom?"

"Greene, himself."

"Can't you be a little more explicit?"

"Why, I mean that I am guarding him."

"Why did you not say so in the first place?"

"Well, that's what I am doing."

"Does he need guarding?"

"I guess he does."

"From whom—enemies?"

"No—cranks."

"They bother him?"

"They have. Why! one fellow has been writing him threatening letters for a month."

"And you have nailed him, I suppose?"

"No, but I expect to. Another covered him with a revolver in an alley near his home and wildly demanded half his fortune to float a new speculation."

"Did he get it?"

"Hardly!"

"You were near?"

"Near and vigilant!"

"Did you get him?"

"Why—no, I didn't," confessed Nick's visitor, humbly.

"I see," said Nick. "Now, then, why do you tell me all this?"

"I want you to help me."

"Oh, you do?" said Nick.

"Yes—I want to make a record. When I ran against you to-day and got acquainted—"

"H'm?"

"I thought, 'Here is the chance of my life-time.' I hunted you up pretty quick."

"Go on."

"One of these cranks I know by sight. I think I know where he hangs out. I didn't know but that, out of professional courtesy, you would take a stroll with me—say tonight—and help me round him up."

Nick scrutinized his caller penetratingly without seeming to do so.

He tried to divine his game. He was not

a fine worker, but he had the audacity to plan to get into his company through a ruse, and hope to incidentally gain his confidence.

Greene, Nick believed, was back of the scheme, but he could not at present conjecture wherefore.

"I am busy to-night," said Nick, after a moment's reflection.

"Then to-morrow night?"

"I hardly think I can help you."

"Oh, yes, you can!"

"Very well—I will consider it. I shall be at the bank to-morrow morning."

"And we'll make an appointment?"

"Maybe."

"I shall hope so, Mr. Carter!"

The detective sat reflecting deeply for some moments after his visitor had left him.

A scheme was on the books—in behalf of Mr. Banker Greene.

"What it is," Nick said to himself, calmly, "will develop at my next visit to the bank."

Nick arose and called to Chick.

He recited the details of the interview.

"What is he after?" questioned the detective's assistant.

"We will find out in its turn," predicted Nick. "Chick, you might look up this fellow in a general way."

"Yes."

"And see that the young lady is safe and comfortable."

Chick nodded assentingly.

"I will be back here to-morrow morning in time to go to the bank with Miss Liscomb."

"You are going away, then?"

"For a few hours."

"Where to?"

"Sing Sing."

Chick indulged in a strange stare.

"Might I ask what for?"

"Certainly, I am going to find out the whereabouts of Dr. Purdue."

"But he is not at Sing Sing?"

"He is not, Chick, but his old partner in crime is—Aiden Lee."

"I see."

"And I count on an interview with this same Aiden Lee as likely to result in the immediate locating of the original of that photograph given to me by Miss Viola Liscomb."

CHAPTER V.

IN SING SING PRISON.

"It strikes me as a dubious proposition, Mr. Carter!"

The speaker was the chief warden of that great prison hive—Sing Sing.

"I shall make a trial, under the circumstances, warden," remarked the secret service man.

Nick had lost no time in taking the first train from New York City up the line of the New York Central.

His plan had been to force a commonplace interview with the man he had locked up in that institution for life for the commission of a hideous crime.

Arrived, however, Nick had learned some facts that at once modified his original scheme.

Now he was discussing his new idea with an interested and accommodating companion.

There was little in the way of co-operation that Nick could not command from his old friend and enthusiastic admirer, the warden.

"Your game won't work," bluntly predicted the latter.

"Why won't it?" demanded Nick.

"No. 9,327 is a wary man."

"Aiden Lee may be wary, but I think I know how to fetch him."

"You generally succeed in what you undertake, but—"

"Go over what you have told me about his cellmate," directed Nick.

"His name is Tyson."

"And he just closed a three years' sentence?"

"At midnight."

"Lee knows this?"

"Of course."

"Tyson has been his cellmate?"

"For the last three days."

"And Tyson is not in his cell at present?"

"He is with a deputy in the office. We turn him out in the morning."

"I understand."

"He receives for his extra money, clothes and the like. We attend to this in such cases the night before, so as to have the liberation a mere brief formality in the morning."

"When Tyson is through with the deputy let me interview him?"

"All right."

"Then stow him where he will be out of the way till morning."

"That is easy."

"Give me ten minutes to study him, the services of the prison barber for five, a suit of stripes, and—"

"You will take his place with his cellmate?"

"That is my plan. What time is the order for cell lights out?"

"Eight sharp, this month."

"At one minute after eight let Tyson return to his cell."

"I see—youself."

"Precisely."

The warden left Nick.

In the course of a few minutes he returned.

A convict accompanied him. The latter looked uneasily and vaguely at the detective, as the warden said:

"This gentleman wishes to ask you a few questions."

Then he left the two to themselves.

"I am not personally interested in you—no old charge to spring on you when you step outside here in the morning," assured Nick, by way of preface.

The convict looked relieved.

"What is it that you want, sir?"

"I wish you to tell me, in detail, all that you know about your last cellmate."

"No. 9,327?"

"Yes."

"It is not much; he is the most close-mouthed chum I ever struck."

"He may have let something drop along a line that will interest me."

"What's the line, sir?"

"His friends."

Tyson shook his head.

"He doesn't seem to have many friends," he declared.

"Is that so?"

"In fact, judging from his vague complaints and anxiety, they have all gone back on him."

"He said that?"

"He intimated it."

Convict Tyson rambled off into a series of desultory comments on this theme.

Nick let him talk. There was little grain among the chaff, but one kernel was treasure for the gifted expert, who made of a hint oft-times what most men could not evolve from a volume of plain direction.

Nick turned the convict over to the warden, went with him to hospital quarters and had a private seance with the barber there.

Then he devoted a few minutes in the warden's own room to his private exigency case, containing in small compass the complete outfit of a well-equipped actor's dressing table.

It was exactly two minutes of eight when Nick Carter, the detective, was finally transformed into Tyson, the convict.

The warden looked both surprised and admiring.

"We'll try it on the guard," he said. "If that shrewd individual does not spot you, I will call you the slickest character actor in existence."

"I shall pass muster," confidently prophesied Nick.

He did so. When the guard came after him he swung his keys in his usual mandatory fashion.

His glance never detected an imposition.

Nick had to pass as many as thirty cell doors down the tier balcony.

The lights in these had been just shut off—the outside illumination was, therefore, more clear by contrast.

The detective felt that the eyes of more than one criminal who knew him personally were upon him.

He kept his face as far as possible from critical inspection.

Nick felt perfectly secure and sanguine as a door swung open and he made a speedy glide over its threshold.

He noticed a form lying on the lower bunk in the cell.

Nick drew a stool to the rear of the cell. The outside light penetrated only dimly to that end.

He hummed a tune almost inaudibly while he drew off his jacket.

Twice Nick feigned a sharp glance at the motionless figure on the bunk.

Nick was very well aware that its occupant was wide awake.

In addition, his cellmate was watching his movements, for Nick caught the glint of keen, beady eyes.

Nick had "prepared" that jacket. He picked out some stitches in the inside lining.

Finally removing the patch these held in place he brought to light a creased piece of paper.

Nick slanted this toward the light which penetrated the grating, without himself coming within its direct range.

He pored over the fragment of paper, chuckled, folded it up and slapped his knee in vehement joy.

"Happy, ain't you!" sounded out a gruff but guarded voice.

"Hello! you awake?" retorted Nick.

He feigned alarm and confusion, and made a great ado at palming the fragment of paper.

"Got your quitting documents?" growled the man on the bunk.

"They're waiting and ready for me in the morning."

"Lucky!"

"Your turn will come!"

"Yes, it will!"

"Oh, I forgot—you're booked clear through, ain't you?"

Nick could hear Aiden Lee grind his teeth.

"What kept you so long?" Lee asked, after a pause.

"Oh! receipting and rigmarole of that sort. Then, the warden has advice to give you, and the chaplain consolation—the regular moral bath that they put you through on graduation!"

The man on the bunk was headed up almost against the stool where Nick sat.

They could, therefore, converse in those guarded tones made necessary by the restrictions of the prison.

"What are you going at when you leave here?" inquired Lee, with natural curiosity.

"I am going, first," said Nick, "to see how easy it is to get capital."

"Starting in business, eh?"

"Yes."

"What kind?"

Nick ventured a sly laugh.

"Banking!"

"Ah! How I envy you. Your enterprise needs capital, does it?"

"A little. I think I can find a backer."

"You want a backer?"

"Positively necessary!"

"What then?"

"I'll show my partner a famous building."

"Bank, I suppose?"

"You're good at guessing."

"Old game; cracking a place you've dreamed of so often here that you imagine it's easy—till you find out!"

"New game; only a blow pipe, and lots of time to work it in."

Lee sat up erect. His curiosity and his natural criminal instincts got the better of his usual reticence.

"You're rather interesting," he observed.

"The lay-out is, at any rate!"

"Seems to be."

"Look there," said Nick, and he half-opened the folded piece of paper he had traced and crinkled and soiled, for effect, in the warden's office.

"A lot of lines and dots?"

"Every one of them good for a thousand dollars."

"You don't say so?"

"I'd just as soon tell you—you're safe not to break across my trail."

"That's sure, curse it! Oh! that I had your chance!"

"Impossible—so, as I was saying, before I got in here I was for a spell working on the contract of a new building."

"Real work?"

"Well, I was laboring for a purpose—me and my rivet man."

"A pal?"

"Distinctly."

"Then some one else knows your secret?"

"No—he's dead. We sealed the floor of the vaults, under a space to be used by a bank that carries an average cash reserve of nearly a million and a half."

"It's tantalizing to think of it!"

"Do you know what we did?"

"How should I?"

"That floor is made of steel slabs, all right."

"Well?"

"But the rivet heads lead?"

"Precisely."

"All you have to do is to melt 'em?"

"Yes."

"And the floor drops."

"With something else!"

"And your piece of paper there is a diagram?"

"That's it."

Lee turned on his bunk with a restless twist and a groan.

"It's torture!" he whined.

"What is?"

"Being shut up here with such golden chances afloat!"

"Would you stake me if you were out?"

"Would I?"

"Could you?"

"Could I!"

There was another period of silence.

Nick could fancy the vivid thoughts drifting through that wicked brain of Aiden Lee, a natural-born criminal.

Nick was waking up those thoughts, with a purpose; he now deftly led his victim on.

"I want a month of leisure time to inspect, to make sure," he proceeded. "There's a cellar to hire. Then you have to cut into the one under the bank."

"It's the easiest lay-out I ever heard of."

"And the job might have come off three years ago, if I hadn't meddled with other small-fry business!" mourned Nick.

"Ah! you'll find a partner."

"I'll have to know my man before I trust him; it isn't help I need."

"Isn't it?"

"The work is nothing—and there's lots of time. It's being staked, and feeling easy for a spell, so I don't need to worry or hurry and spoil things."

"That's right."

Again Nick let the conversation drop. His cellmate's features were working with animation now.

"How much money would you need?" he finally asked.

"I should say five hundred dollars."

"You ought to be willing to do a good deal for a man who would risk that amount!"

"I would."

"Not half?"

"Yes—even half."

"How about a silent partner?"

"What do you mean?"

"A fellow who stays in the background."

"That would be satisfactory."

"Suppose I furnish the cash now?"

"Don't josh me!"

"I'm not."

"How can you furnish five hundred dollars?"

"Because I've got it."

Nick acted highly skeptical.

"Not in here—not in this cell, of course," pursued Lee.

"Ah!"

"But outside. Look here—I'm hopeless. I've changed my ideas about friends and fidelity, and all that."

"It makes a man blue—this life here. I'll confess."

"However, one like you, knowing the experience, might realize what gratitude means."

"Go on," enticed Nick.

"Suppose I stake you, and you did the job, and come off successful with the stuff."

"Wouldn't I think of you first thing?"

"Would you?"

"Could I help doing so?"

"Would you think of me far enough to devote a good big portion of that money to buying me out of this hole?"

"Yes, I would."

"It's a bargain!"

"What is?"

"The five hundred."

"You provide it?"

"I do."

Lee got up briskly off the bed.

He went over to his little shelf. It contained a book from the prison library.

Nick gave him the stool, being careful to retreat into deeper shadow.

Lee tore out the fly leaf of the volume. Then, drawing his stool up to the cell door and nearer to the light, he produced a pencil-stub and began to write.

dea He covered the sheet rapidly; he folded it
p.

"Study that out in daylight," he said,
anding it to Nick.

"A letter to some one?"

"Yes."

"To a man who will recognize your right
d. o the five hundred?"

"You can rely on that."

"And able to honor the draft?"

"Unless he's a churl and an ingrate; he has
neglected me, but I suppose he sees the
hopelessness of trying to get me out on com-
paratively limited resources."

"How will I find him?"

"The first lines of the letter will direct
e, you."

"Good!"

Nick pocketed the letter—his game had
succeeded.

Lee returned to his bunk.

Nick had arranged with the warden that at
ten o'clock he was to pass the cell door per-
sonally.

If a piece of cloth was twisted on the grat-
ing he was to understand that Nick had ac-
complished his mission.

Some excuse was to be made for his liber-
ation then.

Nick, therefore, climbed into his bunk
without disrobing, after affixing the signal in
a careless way that could not arouse the sus-
picions of his cellmate.

"Oh, I say!" he whispered down to the lat-
ter.

"Well?"

"This friend of yours?"

"What about him?"

"Who is he, anyway?"

Nick anticipated the reply.

The veteran detective's ruse had met with
the most signal success.

"His name," said Arden Lee, "is Dr. Pur-
due."

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE STRENGTH DEMON'S LAIR.

It was at 9:13 a. m. that Nick Carter had
receipted for the letter so mysteriously sent
by special messenger across the Atlantic.

It was twelve hours later almost to the sec-

ond when Nick Carter closed his unique in-
terview in the cell at Sing Sing prison.

One hour afterwards the detective was a
free man, and before midnight he was back
in New York City.

Nick promptly made himself aware of the
contents of the letter that Lee had intrusted
to him in his prison cell.

Its directions were explicit—the infamous
Dr. Purdue was accessible only to chosen
friends, it seemed, and then through an in-
volved and indirect process.

Nick proceeded first to his own home; he
clearly determined what he expected to make
out of the doctor.

There was a mystery concealing the real
events attending the disappearance of Ran-
dal Liscomb, vague even to the detective.

This man, Purdue, could certainly throw
considerable light upon the same, if he
chose.

He would never choose voluntarily, how-
ever, for the disclosure would incriminate
himself.

He could not be taken by the throat, nor
scared into a confession.

He had paid the penalty of his recent crimi-
nal acts to the full, and he was a giant in
strength and a man possessed of a nerve like
steel.

But his isolation was against him.

"The man is up to something," mused
Nick practically. "I shall have to find out
how to get a purchase on him."

At four o'clock the next morning Nick en-
tered one of the darkest, narrowest streets
in New York City.

It was with some difficulty that he passed
the portals of the place to which the letter
written by Lee had directed him.

This was an unlicensed groggeries in the
rear of a Chinese laundry, on Pell street,
kept open all night to give refuge to the
lowest grade of night-hawks.

Nick had his role set for him by the letter.

He made application to the bartender; the
latter steered him against the proprietor.

This person put him through a close cross-
examination.

A third party took Nick in hand, led him
from the place through a maze of yards and
buildings up a stairs, and left him there.

When a little later Nick was shown into a dark, low room up under the eaves of the building he did not recognize his host at once.

Dr. Purdue had lost, or rather modified, his personality to a considerable degree since Nick had last seen him.

Those fierce, keen, black eyes, however, he could not change.

Nor could he conceal the abnormally thick and hairy wrists in which lurked an ox-like power which had won him the sobriquet of "the strength-demon."

"Who are you?" he demanded, in tones of surly suspicion, as Nick confronted him.

"I was Tyson, convict No. 7,354, at Sing Sing, last night."

"Oh! were you?"

"No. 9,327 sent me to you. I suppose you know who that is?"

"Yes, I know," admitted Purdue.

Nick saw that the man was going over points he very well understood, to gain time to study his visitor.

With satisfaction the detective noted that his bold, careless way, and his incomparable disguise, had carried him through.

Purdue locked the door on him, with the words:

"Make yourself at home."

"You are too good!"

"Lee wants five hundred dollars."

"It's me that wants it."

"The same thing."

"Can Lee—can I—have it?"

"Certainly."

"When?"

"Before noon."

"And until then?"

Dr. Purdue led Nick into another room. He pointed around it in an impressive kind of a way.

"There's a bed, there's cigars, there's whisky, and there's papers," he said.

"This is luxury, after Sing Sing!" observed Nick.

"Enjoy it, then, freely, but don't bother me, my mind's full."

"Can't I help you?"

"I don't want help in my affairs, any more than you do in yours," announced Purdue significantly.

"Oh! I just asked."

"Don't ask questions here. You're the first man admitted to my den for a long speck. I can tell you."

"I feel the honor?"

"I admit you only because you come from Lee. When you want breakfast, you see that shaft?"

"It's a shaft, eh?"

"A dumb-waiter is there. Write your needs on a slip of paper and drop the rope and you'll get the best on earth."

"I'd like to live here regularly," said Nick.

"I'm going into this room," continued Purdue, moving to a side door. "This is my laboratory, my private premises. When I'm here, don't look in; and when I'm gone, don't go in."

"Why should I?"

"Or there will be trouble."

"I'm warned!" nodded Nick, coolly lighting a cigar, elevating his feet on a table, and picking up a newspaper to read.

There was nothing in the three apartments of which Nick had free range that afforded any particular interest to the detective.

Behind the closed and locked door Nick could hear his host tinkering at something.

Naturally, he was curious to know what it might be.

No opportunity was afforded of looking into the room, however.

The doctor remained closely closeted for some three hours.

When he came out, he threw himself on a lounge in the large outer room and went to sleep.

It was nine o'clock when he roused up.

He tidied his apparel somewhat, went into the laboratory again, and came out with his coat buttoned well around him.

Nick traced the outlines of some bulky objects in various inside pockets.

The doctor secured the door of his laboratory with a key, and a padlock in addition.

"I am going away," he announced to Nick.

"All right," nodded his guest.

"I shall have to lock you in."

"Why not?"

"Agreeable?"

"Intensely so!" smiled Nick, serene.

lighting another cigar. "You will be back—"

"Close on twelve."

"With the money?"

"Have no fear on that score. I shall have money to burn when I come back!"

Nick wished to follow this man. His mysterious proceedings in the adjacent apartment, his suspiciously bulging pockets, his manner and words, all influenced the detective to the belief that Purdue was on the eve of some grand coup.

The hall door was locked and padlocked on the outside.

Nick's eyes had been useful to him, however, during his few hours' sojourn in the place.

He had anticipated a good deal, and had provided for all kinds of exigencies.

The windows of one room had been objects of some study and investigation.

As Nick heard the doctor's footsteps descend the stairs, he ran to one of the windows.

He had it up in a jiffy, closed it, made a short reach to an adjoining window frame, swung thence to a little balcony and through an opening, with no sash at all, and dropped upon the floor of a building the doctor had just passed.

In thirty seconds Nick had reached the street; in sixty he had started on a cautious shadow of Purdue.

The doctor walked on like a man with his head full of business.

His absorbed manner facilitated a close shadow, and Nick had no intention of losing him in the crowded streets.

When the doctor finally abruptly crossed a street, Nick trailed after him, for he was headed as if to turn down an intersecting thoroughfare directly opposite.

Half-way across, the doctor turned; he had changed his mind.

Nick wheeled with the celerity of a spinning top. In ten steps his shadow would be face to face with him.

It was the closest quarters Nick had ever struck in that line.

He dared not look behind him now, and he assumed a shambling gait.

Nick gave to his frame a twist that, unless

the doctor accurately remembered his clothes, would carry him safely through the ordeal.

He separated the doctor's footsteps from other sounds, and traced how near he was getting.

Another sound, however, drowned out all these minor ones.

"Look out, there!"

"Whoa!"

"Turn aside!"

A spot that had up till this moment held a simmering tar receptacle had become a mountain, a deluge of smoke and flame.

A barrel had upset—had become ignited.

Instantly teams were balking, people running; the scene was transformed into one of commotion and excitement.

Nick stood still, a weaving wreath of the black, heavy smoke cut turban-shape through the air, lifting in ridgy billows.

Nick found himself directly in its centre; now he turned.

Stumbling away, rubbing at his smoke-smarting eyes, was Purdue.

Nick had his opportunity; he seized it, momentarily shielded by the smoke.

His light overcoat went circling toward the centre of flame.

His hat followed. From a pocket Nick quickly produced, unfolded and set in place a heavy slouch.

He swung a beard across his face with the same dexterity, and his lightning change was effected.

A new person entirely, Nick Carter stepped free of the lifting smoke to resume the trail of the man who had come so near to discovering him.

Nick soon regained the trail of the object of his interest.

For half-a-mile it was a mere casual stroll, for Nick felt supremely secure, sheltered by his new disguise.

The doctor glanced at a clock in a jeweler's window as he passed it.

It was two minutes after ten.

He hurried his gait; he turned a corner.

Nick turned it the next moment.

"So!" murmured the detective, coming to an abrupt halt.

Nick had run his game to quarry.

Dr. Purdue had reached his destination.

He ascended the steps of a building particularly well known to the secret service man.

It was the business institution of Nathan Greene, banker, and Nick Carter now knew—scoundrel.

CHAPTER VII.

A "HOLD UP" IN DAYLIGHT!

The game had run to one burrow; this was highly satisfactory to Nick.

The chase had narrowed down to one focal point, and the banking institution held three precious villains in collusion—the doctor, the banker and the fake detective.

Dr. Purdue was going to Nathan Greene for the five hundred dollars.

This showed a connection, past and present, between the two.

Nick felicitated himself that he would soon be prepared to give the situation a twist that would run the enemy into his fold.

Nick entered the bank.

His keen eyes were everywhere, while he approached the window of a subordinate.

He asked the rates charged by the bank for the collection of notes.

Nick occupied two minutes' time, stupidly stumbling over a comprehension of the details furnished.

Then he demanded a blank schedule, and went over to the customers' desk.

Here he seemed conscientiously and laboriously making up some kind of a list, preparatory to filling out the blank schedule.

Meantime, Nick watched the door marked "Private;" through it he had seen the doctor pass.

Perhaps ten minutes went by. Suddenly the bell in that inner sanctum sounded three times sharply.

The man behind the cashier's window arose, and entered the rear room.

He came out with a rather startled face, Nick fancied.

He entered the main vault, and soon after reappeared fairly burdened with a large japanned tin box.

This he carried into the inner room and there remained.

Nick glanced up at the clock. The doctor must have been quite familiar with the

banker to consume a quarter of an hour of his valuable time.

But, perhaps, he was consummating his plans for securing "the money to burn," of which he had boasted.

As the quarter hour struck, some one excitedly rushed up the outside steps, and dashed into the counting-room.

Uttering a hoarse shout, he rushed up to the counter.

Holding to it and swaying from side to side, he electrified the staring teller by shouting:

"Has he been here?"

"Who?" demanded the teller.

The new-comer waved one hand wildly.

He was hatless, his neckwear was disarranged, one cheek was scratched and bleeding.

Nick gave him a single glance, and identified the fellow.

Again, in his wise, inscrutable way, the detective undertoned a mysterious "So!"

The possibilities were becoming entertaining, if complex.

The latest comer was the "bank detective," who had visited Nick at his home the evening previous.

"Stop him!" wildly shouted this individual.

"See here, Marcy, are you crazy?" demanded the teller.

The bank detective let go of the counter, and tumbled to the floor with a crash.

"Warn him," he raved.

"Warn whom?" demanded the startled teller.

"Mr. Greene! Plan to rob—assassinate!"

Two or three of the clerks came running around from behind the counter.

Nick bristled with the conviction that this was simply a prelude; he anticipated and prepared for a finale.

It soon materialized. Suddenly, amazingly, there rang out in the room marked "Private" a loud, detonating report.

A yell ensued; then it seemed as if one of the great plate-glass windows of the room had been shattered to atoms.

"Too late!" screamed the bank detective, rolling over face down, and then lying still.

"Help!" came a muffled, choked cry from the inside room.

"Hear that!" ejaculated the teller.

The bank detective started and bounded to his feet.

He wildly plunged, stumbled, rolled toward the private office.

He fell against its door and carried it inward with him.

Nick glided after, the clerks following his example. There was a crush of excited people in an apartment hitherto only accessible on invitation.

At the window, which he had raised and let fall, smashing it to atoms, was Greene.

His excitement was tremendous; he acted like an insane man.

He ran toward the clerks, waving his hands wildly.

"The police!" he shouted.

"Sir! What has happened?" quavered the teller in a horrified tone.

"Robbery!—attempted murder!"

"Too late!" wailed the bank detective, staggering up to a chair, holding by its back and swaying there.

"Ruin!" groaned Greene.

He sank into a chair, collapsing.

But first he pointed at the floor.

Across the rug—in a faint or knocked insensible—was the cashier.

A welt showed on the side of his head: Nick doubted not that this man at least was a genuine actor in the scene.

Upon the banker's desk lay two boxes; one was the large japaned receptacle that Nick had seen the cashier carry from the outside vault.

The second was smaller—but both were empty.

The teller ran out to the telephone; the racket had attracted a crowd.

The bank doors were closed: a patrol wagon came rattling up.

Nick did not reveal himself.

He saw through the farce which was being enacted to gull the public.

The officer in charge of the police detail instituted a brief informal court of inquiry.

The banker tremblingly narrated how a strange visitor had entered his private room.

He pointed to the desk, and gingerly the police officer examined two deadly-looking round objects resting there.

One was a dynamite infernal machine, with wheel mechanism attached.

The other, a glass jar containing black liquid, had a partly burned fuse running down into it.

"The man entered noiselessly," narrated Greene.

"And set those two things on your desk?"

"Covering me with a revolver."

"Why?" questioned the officer.

"He demanded the money-box of the bank."

"That is a vague designation."

"He warned me to send for it promptly; he lit that fuse."

"And the other—"

"He set the horrible machine going. 'Two minutes,' he said, 'and if the money is not here, I blow you and the bank to atoms!'"

"And himself?"

"He was crazy!"

"There seems to be method here."

"I rang for the cashier. On the peril of his life I commanded him to bring in the cash-box."

"That empty one?"

"As you see."

"When brought here it was full?"

"It contained"—Green gasped—"sixty-five thousand dollars."

"And he took the money?"

"That, and double that amount in bonds."

"Government bonds?"

"Part of them belonging to a client who was to call for them at eleven o'clock."

"Ah!" softly murmured Nick Carter.

"I am ruined, discredited—I wish he had killed me when he threw that small exploding shell yonder to scare me," raved the banker, sinking his head between his outstretched arms on the desk, and his frame shaking with well-simulated sobs.

The bank detective's story was sensational. It came in jerks—in an agonized way of recital.

He had been employed to run down two cranks whose vagaries had fixed on Mr. Greene as a victim.

"You were not in the bank when the affair occurred," questioned the police officer.

"No."

"Why not?"

"I had a very good reason—I was on the

track of the man who had been hanging around here for several days past."

"The one who committed this robbery?"

"From the description—yes."

"You saw him this morning?"

"I have been following him since daylight."

"Why did you not arrest him?"

"I did so. He knocked me down, and threw me into an unoccupied basement. I arrived too late!"

The cashier revived. His story was straight. He had obeyed instructions.

Immediately after re-entering the private room, he was dealt a blow with a paper weight, he affirmed.

Beyond that he remembered nothing till the present moment.

"Which way did the man go?" inquired the police officer.

"He told me to turn off the wheels of one infernal machine. Ugh!" shuddered the banker. "He left me to extinguish the fuse of the other. Horrors! That rear door——"

It was plain to trace how thief and money had gone.

The "noon extras" contained an account of one of the most daring hold-ups or freaks of a crank ever perpetrated in New York City.

The loss of a fortune in cash and another in bonds was itemized.

The bank had closed its doors to the public, and its proprietor had made an assignment.

His condition of collapse and prostration was very serious, it was stated.

His friends had acted on medical advice, and had sent him to the quiet of the country.

The police were working on a variety of clews, but up to the hour of going to press they knew nothing tangible.

Nick Carter, who knew all, said nothing —for publication.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW DEAL.

Nick remained on the scene of the hold-up only long enough to satisfy himself that he had all its details in clear grasp.

Amid the confusion and excitement he was enabled to personally examine the two infernal machines.

They contained dynamite—they were made to "go off"—both of them.

But at a glance the detective discerned that they had been set, despite the avowed two minutes' limit, to do no possible harm in the present instance.

They would, however, pass muster with average police intelligence, and enforce the well-planned and dramatic details of the scheme.

The door through which the alleged crank had departed was found unbolted.

Nick followed the investigating police official out into a yard by this route.

Then he hurried around to the street to make up for lost time.

Gaining the pavement, the first person he ran up against grasped his arm.

"Chick," spoke the detective.

"Yes. What's up in there?"

"A comedy!"

"Indeed?"

"No leisure for explanations now. I have lost time already."

"Over what?"

"The alleged thief?"

"You know him?"

"Intimately."

"You know everything!"

"Pretty nearly—so far as this affair is concerned, at least."

Nick made out a cab in the distance.

He and Chick left the excited crowd thronging the doors of the bank, to hail and enter the conveyance.

Nick gave an explicit direction to the driver.

He urged extreme haste. Chick was awaiting explanations in something of a fervor.

"I had just strolled into the vicinity when the patrol came up," he explained.

"You had seen the young lady?"

"I left her awaiting your coming, as promised."

"That deal is off, Chick."

"I heard something about a wholesale haul, a crank, dynamite, and the like."

"It was real."

"The haul?"

"And the dynamite."

"Explain."

Nick did so.

Chick opened his eyes wrathfully at a narration of the bank detective's exploits.

"Why, the audacious prevaricator!" he denounced with vehemence.

"His story doesn't connect?"

"Scarcely."

"You saw him—"

"At eight o'clock in a restaurant; you told me to look him up."

"Yes."

"At nine he was playing cards ~~in a saloon.~~
He has ever been a gambler.

"This will answer finely."

"For what?"

"When we come to round up the situation."

"And that will be—"

"When we get the main operator."

"The 'crank'?"

"Precisely."

"You say you know him?"

"We are going to his headquarters now. He is Dr. Purdue."

"You don't mean to say it!"

"Certainly. Here is another chapter."

Nick brought in the connecting link between Sing Sing prison and the doctor's den.

"We shall find him there?" murmured Chick.

"I really think he intended to bring me that five hundred dollars," said Nick.

"This is a great scheme—the bank end of it."

"Yes—it lets Greene out finely. We walk on here."

Nick alighted and dismissed the cab.

When he reached the building where he had run down Dr. Purdue and had been housed by that individual early that morning, the detective proceeded with caution.

Chick was directed what to do; then they separated.

Nick had divested himself of his disguise; he was the convict now, as he had appeared that morning.

He was arranging with himself a specious explanation for his surreptitious departure in case he should find Purdue in the rooms. Nick had constructed a most plausible ex-

cuse that might convince with his host, when he became suddenly aware that it was worthless for the occasion.

On arriving at the door of the doctor's quarters he found it wide open.

Nick entered and proceeded from room to room.

Even the laboratory door was ajar; Purdue had, therefore, returned.

"Not here now, though," soliloquized Nick.

The detective traced why, with awakened interest in the man who had looted the Greene establishment.

The laboratory windows were riddled. A work bench was torn to pieces, and there was a great jagged gap in the floor.

A trail of blood led through the rooms and along the hallway.

The manipulator of dynamite had met with a disaster.

How badly he was hurt Nick could not divine, but he estimated that it was no ordinary injury that the doctor had received.

Nick made some inquiries in the building. The explosion had been generally heard and commented upon.

One man had seen a person with an arm wrapped up leave the place.

He had disappeared down a crooked court. At its end all trace was lost.

"At a standstill?" suggested Chick, who had rejoined his superior.

"It looks so," admitted Nick.

"Then we turn our attention back to the Greene end of the combination?"

"Not as yet, Chick. There are elements in this affair that demand the finding of Dr. Purdue before we make public what we know of the real facts of the bank hold-up."

* * * * *

Two days later Nick Carter came into possession of information that somewhat disturbed him.

Two friends of the banker, Greene, had accompanied him to his place of recuperation in the country.

The banker had the general sympathy of the community, when it was given out that his mind was breaking seriously under the shock of his misfortunes.

The bank was a closed institution for all time to come.

Unless the stolen money was recovered, it would pay depositors and creditors a bare ten cents on the dollar.

On the morning of the third day after the hold-up the two friends of the banker brought some sensational information to New York City.

Greene had got away from them the night previous.

They had pursued him to a boat on the ocean beach.

He had put out to sea in the darkness and storm.

The boat was found, upturned and empty, a mile from land, a few hours later.

Nick set his entire professional force at work on the case in its various ramifications.

Not a trace of Dr. Purdue could be found.

The bank detective had dropped out of record as though he had departed for some distant country.

At the end of five days Chick, Patsy and Ida reported a dead lull in every phase of the affair that they had investigated.

Miss Viola Liscomb mourned the loss of her expected fortune.

The matter promised to remain one of those mysteries that occasionally daunt the average detective mind.

But Nick's confidence and resolution were superior to the average.

At the end of a week he adjusted all his affairs, so that he could be at entire leisure to devote his sole energies to the matter that had become a complicated enigma.

Then, alone, and without even apprising his associate, Chick, Nick Carter started out on a silent search for three men he was bound to find—dead or alive.

The banker, the doctor and the fake detective.

And, incidentally, the stolen treasure in Government bonds.

CHAPTER IX.

FROM "WAY-BACK."

"If you want to stay here, my friend, you must register."

"I don't want to vote."

"Here! Write your name in that book."

"No you don't, stranger!"

"Don't what?"

"Get nary signature outen me!"

"It's simply custom."

"Well, I've seen it tried afore, by lightning-rod men."

"Tell me your name, then, and I'll write it."

"Well, you kin call me Ponsonby."

"Good enough. You want a room, Mr. Ponsonby?"

"By and by. I want to sit for the present I'm done out, drat your city frauds!"

"What's the matter?"

"Saw a wagon saying they was selling ~~five~~^{four} dollar boots for two dollars." had'dépd?

"Keef concert thrown in."

"Oh, yes; quite common, that."

"I sot on the tailboard of that wagon, supposing they'd take me to the place."

"And they didn't?"

"Didn't! They went clear across the city and put up the horses at a stable. Said they didn't go nigh the store—they was only advertising it."

"Ha! ha!"

"So, I'll take a rest and maybe a little snooze, and then I'll pick out my room."

"Pay in advance."

"That's the rule?"

"Invariably."

"Suppose you burn down before bed-time?"

"We're insured, and return the money, o course."

"That's all right. There you are."

"Mr. Ponsonby" drew out a long, leather wallet.

It was not so long and lean, however, but that quite a pile of bank notes showed.

At their exhibition the flashy, sporty clerk behind the hotel counter winked at two fellows lounging in easy chairs near by.

The "hotel" was a hard den in a hard part of New York City.

Located among a nest of the very worst dives, it was a marvel that the genial way back specimen who had just entered was not warned on the public street that he was running into a pitfall of the worst kind.

The old granger, however, eased a heel of his boot on the round of a chair and stroke

his straggly gray chin whiskers with the greatest complacency.

He drew out a corncob pipe, chipped up some plug tobacco with a knife, resembling a dwarf feed-cutter, and puffed in ease and enjoyment.

The two fellows to whom the clerk had winked began to manifest activity.

They edged up toward the new guest with unmistakable civility.

One of them remarked to the other that he would go without a meal that night unless he struck some charitable friend.

"How's that?" inquired his confrere.

"All account of oats."

At this the new guest pricked up his ears.

"Oats, eh?"

"Yes—you know I'm on the Board. Had two hundred thousand bushels on a margin—every cent up. Got a quiet tip that a four days' storm was due in the Dakotas. Immense injury to grain—drop of at least four cents a bushel. Thought I knew it all—bah!"

"What happened?"

"Why, their oats out there have all been in the granary for thirty days and more."

At this the new guest turned squarely around.

"Young man," he drawled, "didn't you know that much about farming?"

"No. I supposed the oat-vines were just about ripe."

"The oat-vi—ha! ha!—ho! ho! Je-rushy! Say, landlord, hold me! The oat-vines! Whoop!"

"Why, what's the matter with that?"

"Well, I'll just tell you."

The sharers could not have approached their victim under more favorable conditions.

The old granger seemed immensely tickled at being able to enlighten "them smart city chaps."

He explained the oat in detail; his audience of two were absorbed, enrapt.

"If I'd known that much," observed the Board of Trade speculator, "I wouldn't have dropped my pile."

"Yes, you've put us onto your ropes," observed the other, briskly. "I'm going to return the compliment by showing you a secret in our line"

The new guest looked curious.

"What's that, now?" he inquired.

"You know what dice are?"

"Course—seen 'em in back-gammon, but never played 'em."

"Come in here."

The farmer accompanied them into the bar, where they sat down at a table.

"I'm going to show you," said the sharper, "what a good many people don't stop to consider."

"And what may that be?"

The man shook up three dice in his hand. He flopped them over on the table.

"Now, then," he said, "here's the new discovery—no matter how you throw the dice, the total sum of the top spots and the corresponding bottom spots is bound to be 21."

"Hey?"

"Isn't it so?"

"Let's see."

"Yes, count."

"Six and 3 and 1—"

"Well?"

"Ten."

"Now, the reverse cubes?"

"One and 4 and 6."

"Don't you see?"

"Eleven—total, 21. Say, it's so!"

"Of course it's so."

"Don't people know it?"

"Did you?"

"I didn't, for a fact!"

"It's one of those fool things that has never cropped out generally. It's new. I wish I had a few dollars."

"What would you do?"

"Give me a dollar, and I'll show you."

The farmer reflected. Then he drew out a silver coin.

A man at the bar turned to go to the street.

The sharper hailed him.

"Look here!" he called, "I want to show you something."

The man approached.

"Bet a dollar I can let you throw these three dice, and guess in advance what the sum total of spots, top and bottom, amount to."

"I'll take that."

"He bites quicker than lightning!" remarked the farmer, hilariously.

"Throw."

"Guess."

"Twenty-one."

"Three deuces."

"And three fives reverse—6, 15."

"Why, I see! It's bound to come that way."

"Never thought of it before?"

"Never did."

"Peddle it out slow."

"You bet, it's brand new. Good thing! Worth a dollar to know it."

"Do you see?" triumphantly smiled the sharper to the new guest.

"I do, for a fact."

"Take that experience home with you, and try it on your neighbors."

"Won't I chisel 'em!" chuckled the farmer.

"Here's your money."

"Keep it. I'll take these dice instead."

"Oh, any dice will answer; but here they are."

The farmer fondled them and beamed over his acquisition of vast new knowledge.

He brightened up as if he would like to start out on the warpath forthwith.

"That's why I said I wished I had a few dollars," explained the sharper. "Soon everybody will be onto the wrinkle. Just now a fellow could mint money playing it while it's fresh."

"If you can get bettors."

"I know where to find a slough of them."

"You do? Say, show 'em to me!"

"It's a place of big bets."

"Well, I've got big money."

"How much?"

"Nine dollars."

The sharpers winked at one another.

They knew better. Their lynx-eyes had seen a pinned-together heap of new, crisp bank notes in the granger's wallet when he paid his hotel bill.

"Well, come on," said one of them.

The farmer got up, and his two new friends linked his arms.

They proceeded directly across the street.

In front of a doorway bearing a "To Rent" sign they paused.

A fruit peddler blocked it with his stand for a little two-foot space.

One of the sharers made him a sign; he nodded.

The door gave at a touch, and the trio stood in a hall at the bottom of a flight of stairs.

"Sort of secret place this?" observed the granger.

"Yes, it is only for the choice and select; we wouldn't take you into any rough-and-tumble den, you see."

At the top of the stairs was a lively, noisy room.

The granger seemed dazed by the commotion and strangeness of the scene.

While he stood gawking around, one of his companions glided away.

Returning soon, he continued to pilot his victim.

"I've found a fellow warm to do some betting," he declared.

"I'm ready!" chuckled the granger, rattling the dice in the big open side pocket of his coat.

As he drew out his hand, the man on the side of him made a movement himself in the direction of the pocket.

"Where's your man?" inquired the granger.

"That's him, sitting smoking over at that table yonder," replied the sharper.

The granger looked toward the spot indicated.

A sparkle came into his eye that the ragged, bushy brows of gray did not entirely conceal.

"My man!" muttered Nick Carter, under his breath.

For the granger was the famous detective.

And the man to whom the two sharpers were piloting him was Marcy, the fake-detective of the extinct Greene banking establishment.

CHAPTER X.

"COUNTERFEIT."

The arrival of Nick Carter in the secret gambling den signalized a definite stage attained in a silent search.

A hint run down the night previous that one of the characters in the false bank hold-up was at one time familiarly known to the two men who were now his guides had incited the secret service man to try an experiment.

His success was beyond his fondest expectations.

Nick had arrived at reaching Marcy, the bank detective, by slow degrees.

His friends had led him straightway into his company.

What Nick had planned did not interfere with the lighter vein tactics of the present.

He chuckled and grinned with profound secret glee as he produced his three dice.

Marcy was elaborately disguised. But, just as he had failed to delude Nick on his visit to home headquarters, so now his true personality was clear to the keen expert.

Nick stated his proposition; Marcy whipped out a wallet.

"Here, hold the stakes."

"There's your dice," said Nick, presenting the cubes.

Marcy rattled them.

"You bet that they count up 21, top and bottom?"

"Every time."

"Ridiculous!"

Nick shook with suppressed joy.

"Throw," he said.

"Two trays and a four."

"Mister," asserted Nick, "turn 'em over, and you'll find two fours and a three, making—"

Nick gave a start that was a jerk—he glared, he gasped.

"Where's your 21?" demanded Marcy.

"That's so!" replied Nick, amazingly.

The "fixed" dice counted up just 17. Nick rubbed his head, regarding the disappearing stakes mournfully.

He directed a look of reproach at his friends.

They were mingling with the crowd.

"Don't you want to try it again?" suggested the fake detective.

"No, mister, I don't," said Nick, ruefully.

"See here—there's a roulette wheel. Come, I'll post you, and see that you get a fair show for your money."

"I haven't got any more money."

"Don't tell me that! I saw a wad in your wallet there."

Nick clutched at the place where he had put it.

He acted confused and uneasy.

"Show me the way out of here!" he said, hurriedly.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Marcy. "What's your rush?"

"I've had enough of it!"

"Pshaw! Dice are always uncertain. Come, I'll show you a run at faro that will double every dollar you put down."

"No," said Nick. "I haven't got any money, I told you."

"Why, I saw it, man!"

"You—you thought you did."

"The end of a fifty-dollar bill."

Nick acted alarmed.

Marcy had seized his arm in an engaging way.

"I'm in earnest," he said. "You shan't be fleeced. I want you to make up your loss. Come ahead."

"Mister," said Nick, desperately, "I das-sent!"

"Nonsense!"

"That money——"

"Well?"

"You won't say a word if I tell you a secret about it?"

"Sure not."

Nick looked suspiciously all about him. He led the way to a corner.

He took out his wallet, and he unpinned the parcel of bank notes.

He took off one, and let Marcy inspect it.

"Well?" said the latter, "it's fifty dollars."

"Think so?"

"Haven't I got eyes!"

"How's that!"

The exact prototype in newness and number series Nick drew out next.

"Eh!" exclaimed Marcy.

Across its face was a red skeleton-lined tracery.

It stared up, plain, warning, surprising. It was the word "Counterfeit."

Marcy was gazing vacantly from one bill to the other.

"What is the meaning of this?" he inquired.

"Mister," said Nick, shrewdly, "I don't incriminate myself in nothing?"

"What are you getting at?"

"If I mortgaged the farm and invested four thousand in them——"

"Meaning these bills?"

"And got bit?"

"How bit?"

"First bank a fellow goes to get change the cashier pounds his big 'Counterfeit' stamp down on the bill."

"Did he do that?"

"And every time I try to work one off, the same trick is done, till I get took in—then I'm in it for keeps!"

Marcy looked speculatively at Nick; he studied the two bills keenly.

One corner of each was torn off to remove some defect, he traced it.

But not enough was gone to prevent the general passing of the note, if genuine.

"Stranger," he said, confidentially, "do you mean to tell me you have a lot of these things?"

"Four in my pocket—two stamped red."

"How many did you buy?"

"How's four hundred of them?"

Marcy clutched Nick's arm with fervor.

"You've got four hundred of those bills?" he interrogated eagerly.

"What of it?"

"Do you want to sell them?"

"Why, they're no good!"

"Good! man, they're superb! Blest, if I think they're queer at all! Maybe that corner was a giveaway, but, in the hands of people who know how to run them off——"

"Fellers like you?"

"Yes."

"What then?"

"They're good as gold. I'd like to run against the green goods crowd you got them from. Where have you got them?"

Nick became flustered.

"I suppose you hid them—got scared?"

"It's a scary deal, fooling with sich!"

"Not with me—who knows the ropes."

"That's so."

"I'm going abroad, too, where they can be shifted easy. I'll take the elephant off your hands."

"All right—you come with me."

"Where's the place?" questioned Marcy, as they reached the street.

"You just keep with me; only one thing."

"What's that?"

"We need a dark lantern, a little crowbar and some rope."

Marcy halted, turning the proposition over in his mind.

"Have you got sich handy?"

"Yes."

Marcy led the way three squares.

"You wait here for a few minutes," he said, halting before a row of flats.

"Live here?"

"Day times."

"Go ahead."

Nick counted the steps ascended by Marcy in the darkness.

He took out a card, and hastily wrote upon it.

At the next corner a cab was coming into view.

Nick made a brisk run.

The card and a bank note he hastily handed up to the driver, leaping to the shafts.

"Deliver that, my man," said Nick abruptly. "I see your number—412. I promise to send a double fare to-morrow, if I find that you have delivered this within the next forty minutes."

"Good!" said the driver, as Nick gave him a number and a street—his own residence—"I'll make it in thirty, or go out of the business!"

CHAPTER XI.

A DUEL TO THE DEATH.

"Miss Viola Liscomb."

"Show her in," said Nick Carter.

"Into this room, sir?" asked the detective's servant.

"Yes."

Nick threw an open newspaper across the desk to conceal some rather ominous-looking objects lying there.

These were two knives, two large navy revolvers, two small satchels, surrounded by

heavy chains, and a blood-stained, crumpled, official-looking envelope.

These were mementoes of a night of action, and early morning events of tragic importance.

They announced that the famous detective and his alert aids had closed up finally and satisfactorily the matters of Nathan Greene, ex-banker.

It was the hour of ten. Nick had not slept for over thirty-six hours, yet his keen eye was clear and pleasant.

With a winning smile he welcomed the visitor just announced, for the secret service expert had it in his power to make Miss Viola Liscomb supremely happy.

Her face was pale and anxious as she entered the room.

"Be seated," invited Nick, and the cheerful tones and manner made Miss Liscomb regard him with eagerness.

"You sent for me, Mr. Carter?" she said, inquiringly.

"Yes," nodded Nick.

"About the bank affair?"

"About its ending, Miss Viola Liscomb," announced Nick.

"It is ended, then?"

"Permanently."

"How—"

"And tragically!"

The young girl began to tremble.

"Nathan Greene is dead," observed Nick.

"Oh! yes—he was drowned."

"No, Miss Liscomb, that was a fraud. Greene played to perfection the business man prostrated by misfortune, but his 'insane suicide' was a transparent ruse."

Nick's visitor looked surprised and shocked.

"What Greene really did," proceeded Nick, "was to fool his friends, leaving the memory of an erratic sail and an upturned boat to delude them. He came to the city. He went into hiding."

"Why?"

"Of necessity. It seems that circumstances forced him to disappear—with the money and bonds alleged to have been stolen."

"Which, you told me confidentially, this man, Purdue, had taken by collusion."

"That is it. Green rejoined his colleague."

"Where, Mr. Carter?"

"At a secret haunt provided by the alleged bank detective, Marcy. This Marcy I ran down yesterday. I informed my assistants of his residence. I led Marcy on an idle jaunt, finally imprisoning him. I tried to force him to confess what I wished to know. He absolutely refused."

"Then—"

"My assistants, meantime, started out to investigate his quarters. They located his rooms, securely locked up. They ascertained that two persons had occupied these, with Marcy. There was no noise about the apartments. One window, however, was open."

Miss Liscomb was listening, intently interested.

"The window looked upon a court. My assistant, Chick, secured a long clothes-pole and spanned the space from sill to sill."

"And crossed it?"

"No, his associate, Ida, had discovered a

small pet dog in the building, a spry, intelligent creature. They sent this scout across the frail bridge. It entered the room beyond. Barking furiously, it returned covered with blood."

The young girl's eyes dilated.

"Let me be brief as to what they found, later—the man whose photograph you gave me—"

"Rogers—"

"Alias the doctor, Purdue, dead—and by his side, Nathan Greene."

"It is shocking—horrifying!"

"A duel those two had fought in that room—they were hacked in a hundred places, they lay in a frenzied death clasp. To the waist of Purdue was chained these two satchels."

Nick removed the newspaper from the top of his desk.

"They contain—"

"The missing bonds and the missing cash from the bank."

"I do not understand."

"Dr. Purdue's hand was gone—he had accidentally blown it off with dynamite, in his den, the morning he robbed the bank."

The recital fairly terrified Nick's gentle auditor.

"He got into hiding. Thither he summoned Marcy. Thither the banker came. It looks as though Purdue had chained the money to his waist, and, heavily armed, refused to divide until he was well enough to leave the country."

"Nathan Greene finally attacked him?"

"Yes—and then the tragedy."

Nick took up the crumpled envelope.

"In this," he continued, "I find a detailed

account of the plot that drove your father to flight."

The beautiful girl arose in a state of extreme agitation.

"It vindicates him!" she cried.

"It tells how Purdue set up a vile scheme to fleece him, and then unjustly charged him with an atrocious crime. We must reach your father now—if he is still alive."

"Alive!"

"Yes, he was so when that order for the bonds was sent to me across the Atlantic. Nathan Greene wrote the statement in this envelope. I think he held it as a menace over Purdue. Do not give way! Ah! no wonder!"

Miss Viola Liscomb had fainted—but from an excess of excitement that was half hope and joy.

An investigation of the affairs of the ex-banker showed that only by some such ruse as the hold-up robbery could he have covered the frauds of many years.

The fake detective made a clean breast of everything, thereby cutting in two what otherwise might have been a long sentence to Sing Sing.

THE END.

The next number of the Nick Carter Weekly will contain "Nick Carter as an Expert; or, A Battery that was Tampered With."

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